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## "Are you a real Christian?" Stereotypes, distrust and distinction strategies between "new" and "old" Protestants in Catalonia

*"És um verdadeiro cristão?" Estereótipos, desconfiança e estratégias de diferenciação entre "novos" e "velhos" protestantes na Catalunha*

**Maria M. Grier**

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# “Are you a real Christian?” Stereotypes, distrust and distinction strategies between “new” and “old” Protestants in Catalonia<sup>1</sup>

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*Maria M. Grier*

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The arrival of a high number of followers of the Protestant faith due to the increase in immigration flows has shaped the configuration, expectations for future growth and the public role of the Protestant community in Catalonia. However, the adaptation process between “new” and “old” Protestants has not been free of controversies. In this article, I deal with the analysis of the conflictive relationship between African Pentecostal Churches and the Catalan Protestant establishment. In order to do so, I explore the main transformations of the Catalan Protestant field (the phenomenon of reverse mission and above all the creation of ethnic churches) in recent times. The article is based on the fieldwork carried out among Protestant Churches in Catalonia between the years 2002 and 2006 and on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in an African church in Barcelona in 2004.

KEYWORDS: Pentecostalism, Africa, Christianity, immigration, reverse mission, ethnic churches.

## INTRODUCTION

Jonah (a Liberian pastor from a Pentecostal Church in Barcelona) invited me to an African pastors meeting at his church in January 2004. At the meeting there were around 15 African pastors from all over Spain. All of them were from Pentecostal independent churches. Initially I thought that the meeting was simply a friendly religious encounter. However, I gradually realized that

1 I would like to thank Marta Ramoneda for her comments on an early version of this article and Clara Fons and Blanca Luque for their enormous help with the fieldwork.

the main goal of the meeting was to look for a common strategy in order to achieve recognition by the Spanish and Catalan Protestant Associations and to be legalized by the Government as Protestant churches.

After the meeting, they explained to me that the government and the Protestant Association had asked to them to set up an association of African pastors as a condition for being legalized by the Spanish government and accepted into the Protestant Association. It sounded a bit strange to me because this is not the usual procedure in the Catalan and Spanish religious field. On the one hand, the government can not legally force the churches to organize themselves into an association in order to be recognized; on the other, the Protestant Association had never before promoted the creation of ethnic groups within the association (churches usually group themselves into religious families, not ethnic groups). In addition, I had never heard of the same requirement being made of Philippine or South American churches.

I interviewed a board member of the Spanish Protestant Association some days later. He denied that they were behind the promotion of this organization. However, he admitted that there were some problems regarding the recognition of these African churches and he stated:

We don't know what to do about African churches. We are not sure if they are real Christians. We think that they mix some African traditional religiosity with Christianity. In addition, there have been so many problems with them – like the Andy<sup>2</sup> case and so on.

Similarly, when I called the government's religious office, I was told that they were not promoting the creation of an African pastors group, although they admitted that there were many problems with the legalization of these churches. They argued that the problems were related with bureaucratic issues, with the Protestant Association's point of view regarding these churches and with such episodes as the famous Andy case.

I finally never found out who the promoter of the initiative for an African pastors organization was. However, what was clear to me was that African churches faced more problems being legalized by the government and being recognized as members of the Protestant community than the other churches did.

The aim of the article is to explore why African churches have had more problems with being recognized by the Protestant community and by the government than other churches in Catalonia. Through the analysis of this

2 Andy was a Nigerian pastor (from an African Church located in Madrid) accused of being involved in a prostitution network that brought women from Nigeria to Spain (see "Un pastor evangelista, supuesto jefe de una red que prostituía a nigerianas", 29/11/2002, *El País*).

specific case I analyze the changes in the local Christian geography in recent years, putting special emphasis on the phenomenon of "reverse mission".

The article is divided into four parts. First of all, I will briefly outline the main recent changes in the Christian world. Secondly, I will focus on the effects of global changes on a local level. Thirdly, I will seek to determine the factors that might explain why African churches have more problems being recognized than other churches. Finally, in conclusion, I will underline the specific features of African churches in relation to other new Protestant churches.

The article is based on fieldwork carried out from 2000 to 2008 by the members of the ISOR research group at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in the frame of the research project on "Mapping religious minorities in Catalonia" funded by the Catalan government and supervised by Dr. Joan Estruch. The project aimed to map the religious minorities in the territory. In order to do so interviews with religious leaders and observations of religious celebrations have been undertaken within almost every religious organization in the country. In the case of the Protestant community, more than 300 interviews have been carried out. In addition, the fieldwork has been complemented by a year's ethnographic work at an African church in Barcelona.

#### GLOBAL CHANGES IN CHRISTIAN GEOGRAPHY

In 1999 Peter Berger stated that "the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today [...] is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever" (1999: 3). The former crucial role played by Peter Berger in the sociological theorization of secularization thesis has helped attribute more legitimacy to the already existing criticisms of secularization theory. Currently there are only a few sociologists or anthropologists that would be in disagreement with such a claim.

Research of the development of Christianity in Third World countries has played a major role in showing the vitality of the religious field and in increasing awareness of the key role played by Christian churches in many different contexts. Three different issues have been highlighted as the most relevant transformations of Christianity in recent times: the rise of Pentecostalism, the changes in Christian geography and the transnationalization of the religious field.

On the one hand, the rise of Pentecostalism was largely unexpected (Martin 2002). However, according to Barrett and Johnson (2002) there were over 543 million "Pentecostal/Charismatics/Neocharismatics" in the world in 2002. These figures made Pentecostalism the largest force in world Christianity after Roman Catholicism (Anderson 2006). In addition, and in spite of its North American origin, Pentecostalism has mainly grown in Latin America (Bastian 2006), Africa and Asia.

On the other hand, and in relation with the previous point, Jenkins has pointed out that “the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Already today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in Africa and Latin America” (2002: 2) and he added that “Whatever Europeans or North Americans may believe, Christianity is doing very well indeed in the global South – not just surviving but expanding” (2002: 2).

Finally, many authors have noticed both the ability of religious movements to operate in a globalized world and their role as a globalizing force in the current world. First, religious organizations have adapted themselves to rapid changes promoted by globalization and have learned to use the characteristics of this new environment for their purposes – see, for instance, the intensive use of new technologies. Second, religious organizations have their own agency in promoting the globalization process (Bastian *et al.* 2001; Levitt 2006).

Changes in world Christianity have had specific consequences for European countries. As many researchers (Adogame 2001; 2006; Catto 2008; Aubré 2001; Hunt 2002, etc.) have shown the European Christian field is being transformed by the arrival of new believers and by the reconfiguration of Christian grammar. In this sense, the transformation of the Catalan Christian scenario does not represent an exception in the European field. Amongst these changes, some authors have paid special attention to the phenomenon of the so-called “reverse mission”.

Authors like Catto (2008) or Adogame (2001), among others, have used the term “reverse mission” to designate the arrival of Christian missionaries from southern countries in the North. As Catto pointed out (2008), the idea of “reverse mission” has arisen in Christian missionary circles. It denotes the phenomenon of missionaries now working in countries from which they originally received Christianity. The advantage of using the term “reverse mission” is its strong power as a metaphor to capture and summarize the following statement:

You brought Christianity to Africa/South America, etc. and nowadays Europe is almost completely secular. Currently we (Africans, South-Americans, etc.) have the responsibility to bring Christianity back to Europe.

I frequently came across this statement in interviews with African and South American pastors, which, to a certain extent, is commonplace in the way they explain their role in European societies.

However, the term “reverse mission” has to be taken with some caution. First of all, we have to work carefully to avoid homogenizing a phenomenon that it is extraordinarily diverse and dynamic. Hence, for instance, the incorporation of a South-American priest into a Catholic parish is not the same as the

promotion of a Pentecostal church by an African pastor in a poor neighbourhood and without the help of any other religious organizations (Levitt 2004). Secondly, use of the term "reverse mission" should not hide the fact that the mission flows do not only go from South to North but also from South to South. Finally, we have to take into account the fact that what we call "reverse mission" may be embedded in a broader process of transformation towards a "multi-centered" structure of religious organizations from a transnational perspective. Nevertheless, in spite of the ambiguities related to it, the term "reverse mission" helps throw light on the increasing presence of missionaries from Third World countries in European countries and has become a useful tool for identifying this increasing phenomenon.

The phenomenon of "reverse mission" is strongly linked with the three main changes in world Christianity that I have underlined before. So, the fact that Christianity is a vivid reality, above all, in Third World countries has given impetus to the phenomenon of "reverse mission" and has strengthened the role of Christianity in modern Europe through the increase in immigrants from these countries. In addition, the growing relevance of Pentecostalism has also had consequences in shaping the religiosity of immigrants in the European field. This was also accentuated by the fact that, as many authors have pointed out, many migrants coming from different religious backgrounds join Pentecostal churches in Europe or North America (Vasquez 2003). Finally, the globalization process through the reduction of geographical distances, the intensification of communication networks and the expansion of international population flows has enhanced the scope of contemporary mission.

However, the effects of this "reverse mission" are somewhat different in each specific European religious field. Its impact depends above all on the history of the country, on the composition of its religious field and on its legal framework. Likewise, the specific configuration of these groups of "reverse" missionaries is also highly linked to the colonial history of the country of origin and of the host country, to the concrete composition of immigration flows, etc.

#### GLOBAL CHANGES ON A LOCAL LEVEL

Jean-Pierre Bastian has pointed out that "Il est facile de constater au plan statistique qu'une pluralisation religieuse est en cours et qu'il s'agit d'une tendance générale dans les sociétés européennes contemporaines" (Bastian and Messner 2007: 68). The diversification of the European religious landscape is not only relevant in numerical terms but also in terms of the challenges that are generated by the accommodation of such diversity in European societies. However, talk of the growth of diversity in the European religious field generally leads to overestimations of the Muslim presence and to an obviation of the increasing

number of Protestant adherents. Nevertheless, at least in the case of Catalonia, there are similar numbers of Protestant and Muslim immigrants, or there may even be more new Protestants than Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

Immigration flows towards Catalonia have increased rapidly over the last ten years. In fact, immigrants currently represent 12% of the population of Catalonia (Idescat 2007). The origin of these populations is, firstly, Morocco (32%), followed by European countries (30.4%), Latin America (14.5%), Asian countries (7.5%) and other African nationalities (7.1%). Immigration growth has had a direct effect on the diversification of the religious field. In addition, the fact that immigrants have different geographical backgrounds has accentuated such diversification.

There are currently 915<sup>4</sup> places of worship belonging to religious minorities in the Catalan territory. Among those, Protestants are the most numerous with approximately 435 places of worship, followed by places for Muslim prayer (167) and Jehovah Witnesses' "Kingdom Halls" (147). Exact data is not yet available but we guess that from 2000 to the present day religious minorities have, at least, doubled in terms of the number of places of worship.

The Catalan religious map is changing rapidly and the transformations in the Christian geography are notorious. Changes are noticeable in all Christian denominations. Thus, for instance, there was only one Orthodox church in the country in the late seventies, but now there are more than 31 belonging to different patriarchates (ISOR 2007).

The Catholic church is no exception. Many Catholic adherents from Third World countries have joined the church in recent years. For instance, within this context, a Philippine Catholic parish has been created in order to accommodate Philippine immigrants. A priest and a monk from the Philippines arrived in the country specifically to take charge of the parish. The Philippine parish is the only foreign parish in Catalonia; however, there are many followers from Latin America and Eastern Europe that participate in local parishes. Many Catholic churches have been organizing "Latin American" Sunday celebrations in what they call the "Latin American style". They adapt the songs and sermons to Latin American immigrants. In addition, some priests from Latin American countries have been incorporated into Catalan churches. Then, paradoxically, Catholicism is "exporting" missionaries from the ancient colonies and former mission countries like Argentina, the Philippines and Ecuador to Spain, one of the historical centers of origin of the missions. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that the increase in immigration

3 In addition, it is important to keep in mind that, in Catalonia, there have been as many neighborhood campaigns against the settlement of Protestant, mainly Pentecostal, churches as against Muslim places of worship. However, much more attention is paid to the Muslim cases.

4 Data is from 31/03/2007 (ISOR 2007).



has been perceived as a way of regenerating and revitalizing the role of the Catholic church in the country.<sup>5</sup>

There have also been major changes in the Protestant field. The arrival of new Protestant believers has reconfigured the country's Protestant community. Since the late eighties many new believers have joined the pre-existing Protestant churches while many new churches were created by the immigrant population in the late nineties. So, Catalan Protestantism has grown considerably in recent years.

However, the incorporation of the immigrant population into Christian churches has not been free of controversies and adaptation problems. The conflicts have been more evident in the Orthodox and Protestant fields than, for instance, in the Catholic community or Jehovah Witness groups. As I said at the beginning of this article I will focus on the conflicts located in the Protestant field.

#### AFRICAN CHURCHES IN THE PROTESTANT FIELD

One of the most current conflicts has been related with African churches. As I mentioned before, these churches have had more problems being recognized by the Protestant establishment as "real" Protestant churches. In addition they have also had more difficulties being legalized by the government. In order to understand why African churches have had these problems it is necessary to take three factors into account: the history of Protestantism in Catalonia, the structure and configuration of the Protestant field and, finally, the challenges for Protestant churches posed by the arrival of new followers. Each of these factors is interrelated with the others and, taken together, these elements help understand why "adaptation problems" are more frequent in the Protestant field than with Catholics or Jehovah's Witnesses and why African churches have had more problems than, for instance, South-American ones.

*The history of Protestantism in Catalonia.* There have been Protestants in Catalonia since the 17th century but it was not until the beginning of the last century that the community started to grow considerably. The first Protestant churches were Baptist, Methodist and Spanish Anglicans. Protestantism grew quickly during the first decades of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the arrival of the Franco dictatorship halted its growth and forced the community to

5 The case of the subject of confessional Catholicism at school is paradigmatic of what is happening. Since the transition to democracy the number of students opting for religion gradually decreased in Catalonia but the arrival of new immigrants has given new impetus to the subject. Currently, according to a survey made by a Teachers' Union, around 30% of students who chose confessional religion have an immigrant background (see [http://www.ferc-cat.org/fercbubi/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=162](http://www.ferc-cat.org/fercbubi/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=162)).



operate underground. Protestants were persecuted and their activities forbidden; as a result, many churches lost believers and some even disappeared.

The Freedom of Religion Act (1967) enabled the renaissance of Protestantism in the territory. Many ancient churches reopened, new activities were organized and many missionaries from abroad came to the country (mainly from Europe and North America). However, being forced to operate surreptitiously for many years had strong consequences for the Catalan Protestant community: there were only weak links between churches, they could not count on any special recognition from public institutions, they carried a bad stigma due to the Franco regime's negative campaigns against them, etc.

During the first years of democracy many Protestants were engaged in strengthening the cohesion of the community and improving their visibility and public recognition. Thus, some Protestants decided to create a Catalan Evangelical Board (1981) with the aim of claiming for their rights and as a way of increasing cohesion among the highly fragmented Protestant scenario. In addition, some years later many Catalan Protestants were involved in creating the Spanish Protestant Association – known as FEREDE (1986). The Catalan Evangelical Board then became the representative of the Spanish Protestant Association in the Catalan territory. In 1992 the FEREDE signed a cooperation agreement with the Spanish government which gave new rights to the community and recognized the FEREDE as the representative of the Spanish Protestant community. The agreement (known as the '92 agreement) was perceived by Catalan and Spanish Protestants as the first step towards more visibility and recognition.

Both the Catalan and Spanish Evangelical Boards were mainly promoted, organized and controlled by mainline Protestant groups. Nevertheless the main growth of Protestantism after the dictatorship was not in mainline churches but rather in Pentecostal churches. Through the work of North-American missionaries such Pentecostal denominations as "Assemblies of God" and "Church of God" had considerable success in the country. Likewise, many new independent churches were established on the periphery of urban areas.

The rise of Pentecostalism generated the first controversy within the Protestant field. Power positions within the community were occupied by mainline Protestant members and, in spite of their enormous growth, Pentecostals were kept in a marginal position. Mainline Protestantism distrusted Pentecostalism. Protestant establishments were struggling to be publicly recognized and feared that Pentecostals could undermine their social and public legitimacy.<sup>6</sup>

The atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust between mainline and Pentecostal Protestants were not only the result doctrinal issues. We have to take into

6 Many researchers like Sebastian Fath (2005) and Walter J. Hollenweger (1972) have documented the mainline Protestantism mistrust of Pentecostalism in other countries.

consideration the fact that mainline Protestant churches were mostly composed of Catalan-speaking people from a wealthy background and their churches were mainly in middle and upper class areas. However, Pentecostal churches were located in poor areas and mainly composed of Spanish-speaking people.<sup>7</sup>

The controversy has gradually faded over the years. Pentecostal pastors created their own organization (COMEC) and some of them have also joined the Catalan Evangelical Board. However, the field is already dominated by mainline churches, such that, despite Pentecostal churches being more numerous than other Protestant denominations, power positions in the Spanish and Catalan Evangelical Boards are still occupied by members of the "Protestant establishment". Currently, more than a half the Protestant churches in the territory are Pentecostal (238), while mainline denominations like Anglicans (4) and Methodists (1) have been decreasing.<sup>8</sup>

A consideration of the history of Protestantism in the country provides some clues to help understand the conflict with African churches. We should bear in mind the fact that Catalan Protestantism is a young community with a strong will to be publicly recognized. Whereas Pentecostalism has been perceived and "constructed" as a menace to achieving recognition. To some extent, while mistrust of local Pentecostal churches has diminished in recent years, this distrust has been redirected at the new ethnic Pentecostal churches (especially African ones). As a consequence, new Pentecostal churches have had more difficulties in being accepted in the Protestant field (and all African independent churches are Pentecostal). To some extent, it can be understood through the mechanisms explained by Elias and Scotson (1965) in his analysis of the relationship between the new and old populations of Winston Parva.

*The structure and configuration of the Protestant field.* The lack of a central and recognized Protestant authority is a key element for understanding the differences between Protestant and other more hierarchical organizations such as the Catholic church or Jehovah's Witnesses. Thus, for instance, the phenomenon of "reverse mission" in the Catholic field is designed and controlled by the power centers of Catholicism. However, there is no central Protestant authority capable of controlling the definition and development of "reverse mission"; Protestantism works as a network rather than a top-down and centralized structure. From this perspective it is easy to guess why, as I mentioned before, "reverse mission" has had different effects on the Anglican and Catholic fields in comparison with those on the Protestant context (see Levitt 2004).

This lack of central authority in the Protestant field has been interpreted by some authors to be an advantage when dealing with the needs of adaptation

7 Most of them were immigrants (or their parents were immigrants) from the South of Spain.

8 Pentecostalism is the most successful denomination within the Catalan Protestant field. They are followed by the Baptists with 69 places of worship and Brothers' Assemblies (49) (ISOR 2007).

and a benefit for competitiveness in the religious market. As it is not restricted by top-down institutions, Protestantism is attributed greater flexibility. In addition, it has been said that this flexibility is indeed more remarkable within Pentecostalism (Bastian 2006). However, not having a central power has led Protestantism to be more fragmented, with less cohesion and more susceptible to splits. Last, but not least, the lack of a top-down structure has generated more difficulties for defining the way in which governments negotiate and implement “recognition policies”.

So, paradoxically, the construction of a central authority in the Protestant field has in many cases happened artificially through the definition of the relationship between Protestant churches and the government. In the case of Spain, the government asked Protestants to organize themselves into a single and representative body as a condition for negotiating and implementing recognition policies. Thus, in order to negotiate the ‘92 agreements, the Spanish government established the condition of creating a single interlocutor. Afterwards, through the legal agreements reached (between FEREDE and Spanish government) the Spanish government handed regulatory power to FEREDE and recognized this organization as the central authority for Protestantism in Spain. To some extent, it is the consequence of the government’s extrapolation of the church-state model to the Protestant community.<sup>9</sup>

The prominent position of the Spanish Evangelical Board is not only a matter of honor or symbolic recognition; rather, it has real effects on the definition of the rules of the field. That is to say, if a church wishes to be recognized by the government as “Protestant” and be granted the rights attached to this status, the church needs to be previously accepted by the FEREDE.<sup>10</sup> Acceptance is an almost automatic procedure if the church belongs to an “evangelical family” that is already a member of the association. However, it can be a long and difficult process if the church is independent. For instance, if an African independent church located in Catalonia asks to become member of FEREDE the procedure will involve the following steps. First, the church has to make a proper application (and be endorsed by two Protestant churches) then the Catalan Protestant association will make a report on this church, which will be sent to the Spanish Protestant association, where its content will be analyzed and then the Association will decide whether the church is to be accepted or not.<sup>11</sup> If there are no additional difficulties, the process can take one or two

9 This application of the Catholic model to other religions has been widely analyzed in the case of Islam (Maussen 2006; Bader 2007; Griera 2008b).

10 To know exactly what rights will provide the admission to the FEREDE see <http://www.ferede.org/general.php?pag=faq> (April, 2008).

11 In its webpage the FEREDE confirms that there are no exact and explicit criteria for deciding which churches can be accepted into the association (see <http://www.ferede.org/general.php?pag=faq>, April 2008).

years (in the case of African churches there were additional difficulties and so the process has taken longer).

We have to distinguish between this process and the process of the legalization of churches by the government. The latter process has its own specific procedure and is administered by the ministry of Justice of the Spanish government. It is a long and a convoluted bureaucratic process and, also, it is more complicated for independent churches than for other churches. These difficulties are greater in the cases of those who do not speak Spanish or those who are not familiar with Spanish administrative procedures (which is generally the case with African independent churches).

Legalization as religious entities by the government will provide churches with the same rights as any other religious organization; however, churches need to be accepted into the FEREDe in order to enjoy the rights acquired by the Protestant community through the legal agreements signed in 1992.

So, the Spanish Protestant Association has had the authority to regulate the Protestant field. However, at the same time, if there is any problem related to Protestant churches it is the Catalan or the Spanish Evangelical Board that have to vouch for them to the government. To some extent, the government has charged them with the responsibility of controlling the development of the field. Therefore, Protestant establishments appeal to this "responsibility" in order to justify the need to watch over and be cautious of new ethnic churches.

*Challenges posed by the arrival of Protestant immigrants.* The increase in the immigrant population from the late 1980s generated great expectations among Catalan Protestant churches. In a way, the arrival of Protestant followers was identified as a good opportunity to enlarge the Protestant community and to increase its importance in the Catalan religious scenario. In the early 1990s, these expectations were fulfilled. Many new Protestant believers joined Catalan Protestant churches and the Protestant community grew considerably. Many churches created specific mechanisms of social assistance for immigrants and accommodated their churches to these new believers (for example, by singing songs in other languages, by creating bible schools in English, etc.). Nevertheless, especially since 2000, the scenario has changed. Two simultaneous and linked processes have provoked a reconfiguration of the relationship between "new" and "old" Protestants and have generated new challenges for the Protestant establishment.

On the one hand, some problems caused by the coexistence of "new" and "old" Protestants have been emerging within some churches. These problems have mostly been related with the following questions: the use of the church building, church leadership and discussions of economic issues. The problems have been mainly focalized in churches with a high number of African members. When I documented these cases I found that although they were not

particularly relevant in numerical terms, they were significant because they generated a wider debate within the Protestant community regarding the best way of integrating the immigrant Protestant followers into the churches. In the debate, the African followers, particularly Nigerians, were identified as the most problematic. According to the view of the “Protestant establishment” the conflicts concerned the Nigerian “abuse” of church buildings, their lack of discipline and the performance of rituals that were not usual in the Catalan Protestant field.<sup>12</sup> Some Nigerian members were expelled from some churches and that was the first step towards the conflict between African and local Protestant followers.

In addition, around the year 2000, “reverse mission” became an important phenomenon in the Protestant field. To understand why it was not until 2000 that the phenomenon of “reverse mission” became relevant we have to take into account two linked factors. First, up to that point there had not been sufficient Protestant believers to make the organization of ethnic churches within local churches feasible. Second, as many authors have pointed out, the self-organization of an immigrant community usually takes place some years after its arrival in the country. It is necessary to first face the basic needs in order to be able to promote diaspora organizations.

However, as I said, the phenomenon of “reverse mission” is not homogeneous and can take different shapes. It is currently possible to identify three different kinds of “reverse mission” processes in the Catalan Protestant field. Each of these different processes has different consequences in facilitating or complicating the incorporation of immigrant Protestant followers into the local Protestant field. I identify three types of reverse mission: those that take place within local churches, those promoted by southern multinational churches and those that are started by independent migrants.

First, there is the creation of “*ethnic churches*” by local churches. Due to the coexistence conflicts within churches and the demands by immigrant members to worship in their own languages, local churches have sponsored the arrival of missionaries from the countries or regions of origin of immigrant churchgoers. They have thus promoted the incorporation of pastors from Third World countries in Catalan churches in order to simultaneously keep their members and to facilitate the management of the church. The creation of an “ethnic branch” within a church is more common in religious organizations that belong to an international religious organization. In some cases they have asked their Southern or Eastern partners for a pastor and, in other cases, they have trained an immigrant member of their church in pastor leadership skills.

12 I never found out exactly about what kind of rituals they were talking about. In the interviews with members of the “Protestant establishment” they were rather vague about what sort the rituals they were referring to.

What I call an "ethnic branch" within churches implies the institutionalization of an ethnic community with their own pastor and with their own religious celebrations. However, the promotion of such a community is done within the frame of an already pre-existent local church. Thus, the "ethnic community" shares the building with the local one and, usually, the ethnic church is under the guidance of the Catalan community. The specific arrangements between the communities vary from church to church – some of them are quite independent from one another, some are more hierarchical, etc.

This model facilitates the incorporation of the community into Catalan Protestant networks. Moreover, being accepted into the Protestant association or being legalized as a church are not even necessary in this case, as ethnic churches are sheltered by the umbrella of the local ones. The creation of "ethnic branches" is also the predominant model for incorporating immigrants into the Jehovah's Witness or Seventh Day Adventist churches.

Currently there are many Protestant churches that have "ethnic branches". There are some churches that have been highly successful in attracting immigrant followers and creating "ethnic branches"; being some of the most widespread Pentecostal churches in the world (Assemblies of God, United Pentecostal Church, etc.), especially, the "Church of God", which has more than 10 "ethnic branches" in Catalonia (among them there are Rumanian, South-American and Philippine branches). However, it is not by chance that these churches have been able to attract migrants. Many immigrant followers were already members of the church in their country of origin and asked their "church of origin" for information about churches in Catalonia.

There are many more churches that have an "ethnic branch", in fact, there are currently around 20 local churches that have created an "ethnic branch" annex to their church. However, most of these have only one "ethnic branch". Pentecostal churches have been the most successful in attracting immigrant followers, but nevertheless there are also some mainline churches that have already created "ethnic churches".

This model of reverse mission is the one preferred by the Protestant establishment. In a certain way, it caters for the growth expectations of the Protestant community, allows local churches to keep control of their own growth and helps ease adaptation problems. In addition, according to the Catalan Evangelical Board, this model facilitates "intercultural dialogue between migrants and autochthons and helps to integrate immigrants into Catalan society".<sup>13</sup> However, there is only one African branch belonging to a local church (a Ghanaian branch of the Assemblies of God).

The second type of "reverse mission" is linked to *southern multinational churches*. As many authors have pointed out (Bastian *et al.* 2001; Freston 2001)

13 Interview with a member of the Catalan Evangelical Board.



southern multinational churches are increasing their presence in European countries. To some extent, their success is closely related to the increase in immigrants from southern countries, although they also try to attract European followers.

In the past few years, some multinational churches from the South have set up franchises in Catalonia. There are many churches belonging to southern multinational churches in the country, and these have different origins and characteristics. The following table shows the main southern multinational churches in Catalonia:<sup>14</sup>

*Table 1*

**Southern multinational churches in Catalonia**

Name of church	Origin	Number of churches in Catalonia
The Church of Pentecost	Ghana	12
Iglesia Pentecostal Unida en Colombia	Colombia	4
Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus <sup>15</sup>	Brazil	4
Deeper Christian Life Ministry	Nigeria	3
La Luz del Mundo	Mexican	3
The Apostles' Continuation Church International	Ghana	2
Kosin	Korea	3
Iglesia Evangelica Ríos de Vida	Argentina	3
Assembléia de Deus – Ministério de Madureira	Brazil	2

In table 1, I have only included the “southern multinationals” that have more than one church in Catalonia; however, there are many other multinational churches in the territory such as the Philippine “Jesus is the Lord Church” or the Colombian “Iglesia de Dios Ministerial de Jesucristo Internacional”. Presumably, some of these “southern multinationals” that still have only one church will have new churches in Catalonia in a few years time. We have to consider that the increase in immigration flows from these countries towards Spain is a recent trend (above all, compared with other European

14 It is important to take into account the fact that there are also North-American multinational churches that have arrived in Catalonia through African migrants such as the “New Life Ministries International”.

15 It uses different names such as “Pere de Sufrir”, “Comunidad Cristiana del Espíritu Santo”, etc.



countries). So, apart from the Mexican "Luz del Mundo" and the Brazilian "Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus", most of the churches arrived in the country over the last ten years.

The creation of a multinational church can be promoted by immigrants that live in Catalonia, or it can stem from the initiative of the multinational church itself. However, generally, both issues are related. In the first case, we have the example of the "Church of Pentecost". As a member of the Ghanaian "Church of Pentecost" explained to me:

One day we realized that there were many Ghanaians in the local Protestant churches. The churches were OK but we missed our own churches. Then some of us organized a Ghanaian meeting and we decided to promote the creation of a new Pentecostal church. We discussed what kind of church. Finally, we decided to promote the creation of a branch of The Church of Pentecost in Barcelona. However, there was no pastor among us. Then we decided to send a person to Ghana in order to be trained in pastor leadership. At an assembly we decided that I would be the pastor [...] Nine months later I came back to Barcelona and we began to organize the church [...]. (Barcelona, May 2004).

At the same time some multinationals have set up branches in Catalonia as a result of the growing strategies of these churches. However, both issues are usually related. That is to say, along with the will of the "mother church" to grow, some migrants are interested in opening a franchise of their homeland church in Catalonia.

Almost all the multinational churches are Pentecostal. However, this is nothing new. During the decades after the transition to democracy many Pentecostal multinational churches set up branches in Catalonia. However, almost all of them had their headquarters in North America, while they now mainly have their headquarters in the southern countries. The Pentecostal ability to operate in a globalizing world has been remarked upon by many authors (Coleman 2001; Jenkins 2002; Robbins 2004).

There are some southern multinationals that have a close connection with some Catalan and Spanish Pentecostal churches (especially the South-American ones). Moreover, "Spanish-speaking multinationals" are not considered by the Catalan Protestant Communities to be "ethnic churches". This is due to the fact that they have many Spanish followers, because they share a similar "imagined community" with Catalan and Spanish Pentecostal churches (music, TV channels, etc.), they participate in Catalan Pentecostal meetings and so on. Some of them are in the process of asking to become members of the Catalan and Spanish Protestant Associations.

The "Church of Pentecost" is the most successful "southern multinational church". However, its pastors did not attend the African pastors

meetings. When I asked them about this point they argued that they do not need to attend these meetings in order to be legalized, and they do not need the help of other African churches. They argued that when they have legal or other types of problems the Ghanaian consulate helps them and that, in addition, they claim they have a good relationship with the Catholic church. They use the premises of the Catholic church, and at the same time they have a close relationship with Caritas, the social aid agency of the Catholic church.

The reasons why “southern multinational churches” have not had as many problems as African independent churches in their relationship with the Catalan Protestant establishment are related to different factors. On the one hand, multinational churches already have an infrastructure that helps them to overcome bureaucratic problems. On the other hand, their international presence does not make them as vulnerable to the criticisms of the Protestant establishment as African independent churches are.<sup>16</sup>

Thirdly, there is what Claudia Währisch-Oblau (2000) calls “*migrants with a mission*”. I use this concept to refer to the pastors who decided to create a church that is not formally linked either to a church in their home country or to a local church. In Catalonia most of these churches are Pentecostal and their pastors are Africans. In Catalonia there are currently more than twenty-four independent African churches. Almost all of them were created between 1999 and 2006. Within them, there are Nigerian churches, French-speaking churches, African mixed churches, Ghanaian churches, etc. These are the churches that have had the greatest difficulties being accepted into the Catalan and Spanish Protestant field.

The specific characteristics vary from church to church but it is possible to identify some common trends.

First of all, most of them identify themselves as Pentecostal even though most of their members, and even the pastors, did not belong to Pentecostal churches in their homeland. Adogame and Chitando (2005) distinguished between three different religious identities among African Christians: those who became Christians for the first time, those who changed their religious affiliations; and those who consciously maintain dual or multiple religious affiliations. It is possible to identify these three kinds of African churchgoers in the African churches in Catalonia. Incidentally, the success of Pentecostalism among migrants has been widely dealt with by many authors (Martin 2002; Griera 2008a; Coleman 2001; Hunt 2002).

16 In addition, as I mentioned, within multinational churches the African ones are seen as “ethnic churches” while the Latin American ones are not. However, there is also suspicion about, for instance, the Brazilian “Igreja Universal do Reino do Deus” but we will not be examining the issue in this article.

Secondly, all of these churches have strong charismatic leaders. As Vasquez (1999) pointed out, this is a common characteristic of independent churches. The existence of charismatic pastors leads independent churches to have more splits. So, in between the twenty-four African independent churches in Catalonia, there are already three that are the result of splits.

Third, the pastors did not initially come to Catalonia in order to be pastors. The motivation for their migration was mostly linked to economics. They decided to become pastors when they were already in Catalonia and after having frequented different Catalan churches.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, most of them agree that they took the initiative to found the church after they had realized that Catalan churches were not "strong" enough and when they had felt the "call" to become pastors. In many cases this "call" has been surrounded by dreams, visions and other signs from the Holy Spirit. Afterwards, they have attributed a transcendental meaning to their migration process and have interpreted it as being the will of God. Bringing Christianity to secular Europe and fighting against the devil that misleads African migrants have become their mission.

It is also important to remark that these churches neither call themselves "ethnic" churches nor identify their potential members on the basis of their country of origin. Their "Christian" identity is seen as something that transcends cultural, ethnic, national and confessional categories (Währisch-Oblau 2000). Thus, they put considerable effort into trying to build up non-diasporic churches. With this aim, they organize many evangelistic campaigns and there are even many churches that provide simultaneous translations into Spanish. However, their attempts to attract non-African people have not been very successful.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that these churches are also involved in transnational networks, whereby approximately half of the African pastors travel around Europe participating in "Pentecostal revivals" or other Pentecostal events at least once a month. They have close connections with other African European churches. Furthermore, one of the most successful African Catalan churches (which has three churches in Catalonia) has even founded a branch in London. However, their connections are not only with European churches. Some of them also have strong links with churches in their homeland. For instance, there are two other African-Catalan organizations that have already founded a church in Nigeria. So the flows are heading in the opposite direction to those of the southern Pentecostal multinationals.

There are many other characteristics of African Catalan churches that could be underlined, such as their role in providing wealth and material support to

17 There are two exceptions. There is one pastor who came expressly to take charge of an "ethnic branch" linked to a Catalan church. After some years in the country, he decided to create his own independent church. In addition, there is also one pastor who decided to become a pastor while he was on his way to Barcelona (specifically in Ceuta where there are many Pentecostal migrant churches).

their followers, the role of the pastor within the community, the composition of the churches, etc. However, in order to understand why African churches have had more problems than franchises or “ethnic branches”, it is important to note that most of these African independent churches are in a highly precarious situation:<sup>18</sup> they congregate in garages or similar places, they are located in poor neighbourhoods, most of the pastors do not speak Spanish, many pastors do not have up-to-date residence permits, they only have weak ties with autochthonous churches, etc.

#### WHY DO AFRICAN CHURCHES HAVE MORE PROBLEMS BEING RECOGNIZED THAN OTHER CHURCHES?

African churches are on the periphery of the Catalan religious field. They have been the target of a considerable amount of criticism and have suffered the effects of a strong negative campaign of discredit. They have been accused of not being “real” Christians and of performing “strange rituals”. In this sense, Adogame and Chitando pointed out that “xenophobic attitudes towards African religions tend to portray these religions as childish, backward and unrefined” (2005: 267).

In addition, African churches have been constructed as problematic and even dangerous. The already mentioned “Andy case”, as well as other cases in Catalonia (such as complaints from the neighbors about the noise made by the churches, or the arrest of one African pastor accused of selling false residence permits), were widely publicised and largely discussed in the Protestant field. This strong negative campaign has had effects on the admission of these churches into the Protestant field, and hence they have had more problems than is usual in being legalized, and consequently enjoying the rights that would stem from their legal status as a Protestant church.

However, it is not only the negative campaign that has negatively affected their recognition as Protestant churches; their precarious situation has also played a role. This precariousness has driven them to be trapped in the bureaucratic labyrinths of the Spanish Protestant Association and the Ministry of Justice. From the Catalan Protestant Association’s point of view these churches’ problems might be solved if they were to attach their churches to a local one. In that sense, a member of the Catalan Evangelical Board told me: “if they were a branch, then the legalization problem would be really easy to solve. Our problems are the independent churches. We can not legalize them automatically”. In addition, according to Protestant establishments, it would help if they were to adapt their style of worship. As a member of a mainline church

18 To some extent, this is a consequence of their recent creation and it is feasible to believe that many of these issues will improve in a short period of time.

told me: “Their form of worship is so different from our style. In Catalonia we are more rational and quieter. Maybe the second generation of African people will be more like Catalans and then the relationship will be easier.”

To some extent, African churches are having more problems than other churches because they simultaneously challenge the traditional meaning of mission as well as the traditional discourse concerning migrants. They are not only promoting “reverse mission” by which missionaries come from Third World countries; they also maintain control over the whole mission. At the same time, they challenge the role of migrants as mere clients of their churches and of their social assistance institutions. In short, they do not want to be saved; rather, they want to save the West and they do not want to play a subordinate role in the process.

#### POSTSCRIPT

This article was written in late 2006. From then until now, there have been some changes in the field. The Catalan Evangelical Board has created an association of immigrant pastors within the association. The goal of this association is to promote the integration of these pastors in the Protestant association, to facilitate exchanges among them and to provide them with social capital networks. The association has also helped some churches to solve their bureaucratic problems. Some African pastors belong to this association and some African churches have even been accepted into the Catalan and Spanish Protestant associations over the last two years. These changes may represent the first steps towards a more trusting relationship.

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"És um verdadeiro cristão?" Estereótipos, desconfiança e estratégias de diferenciação entre "novos" e "velhos" protestantes na Catalunha ♦ Maria M. Grier ♦ Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona ♦ [mariadelmar.grier@uab.cat](mailto:mariadelmar.grier@uab.cat)

A chegada (através do incremento de fluxos migratórios) de um número significativo de crentes à Catalunha alterou significativamente a configuração, expectativas de crescimento e lugar público da comunidade protestante daquela região. No entanto, o processo de adaptação entre "novos" e "velhos" protestantes não foi isento de controvérsia. Neste artigo, analiso a relação de conflito que se desenvolveu entre igrejas pentecostais africanas e o *establishment* protestante catalão. Para o fazer, exploro as principais transformações ocorridas no campo religioso protestante da Catalunha (o fenómeno de "missão reversa" e, sobretudo, a criação de "igrejas étnicas") nos últimos tempos. Este artigo baseia-se em trabalho de campo etnográfico desenvolvido entre igrejas protestantes catalãs entre 2002 e 2006, e em particular numa igreja africana em Barcelona em 2004.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: pentecostalismo, África, cristianismo, imigração, missão reversa, igrejas étnicas.